

Executive Summary

National Cave and Karst Research Institute

Visioning Workshop

The National Park Service, in partnership with New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology and the city of Carlsbad, New Mexico, hosted a visioning workshop for the National Cave and Karst Research Institute on October 5-6, 2003. The workshop was held at the Fish and Wildlife Service, National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. A diverse group of participants attended including representatives from Federal land management agencies, state parks and agencies, associations and NGOs, and academia. The purpose of the workshop was to share perspectives and to actively involve a broad segment of the caving community in considering the long-term vision, activities, organizational structure, and operating plan of the Institute.

In preparation for the meeting, attendees were sent background material on the Institute, including the Congressional Act establishing the Institute, previous work done by the Federal Working Group, MOUs with primary partners, budget information, and descriptions of potential organizational models.

Day 1, October 5, 2003

The first day opened with a briefing that provided snapshots of the history of the Institute and its current status and financial support. Each participant then shared the mission of the organization he/she represented relative to caves and karst. The group brainstormed gaps and opportunities they saw for the Institute that would neither duplicate nor undermine the work of their organizations. Several themes emerged that were repeated in later detailed discussions:

Gaps and Opportunities Themes:

- National assessment, status, and trends of caves and karst
- Research catalog of national needs and issues
- Large scale perspectives (international, national, regional, watershed)

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- Role as catalyst for bringing together:
 - Cave and karst researchers from other disciplines
 - Tier 1 universities
 - Private cave owners
 - Resource managers
 - International cave and karst researchers
- Role as clearinghouse for:
 - Information on cave management
 - International cave and karst literature and research
 - Collections (archiving, preservation, data, physical collections)
 - Volunteer issues and opportunities
 - Protocols, best practices, lessons learned
- Visitor education
- Public awareness
- Field laboratory for resource management practices

Using this discussion as a springboard, the elements of an Institute core ideology including core purpose and core values were discussed.

Core Purpose: The Institute exists to promote understanding and protection of cave and karst systems.

Core Values:

- Science-based stewardship
- Objective science
- Education
- Shared decision-making
- Benefit all segments of society
- Leadership

Draft Core Value Statements:

- Objective, science-based research on issues related to caves and karst *<promotes understanding and wise resource management>*
- Improved understanding of caves and karst leads to better decision-making and benefits all segments of society
- Cooperative efforts with shared decision-making and workload assignments lead to both better science and science-based implementation

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A context setting exercise was facilitated to uncover significant existing and future trends impacting caves and karst and, therefore, the Institute. The discussion included trends in science, technology, politics, economics, funding, and customer/stakeholder needs and wants. Details are included in the attached Workshop Notes. A graphic summary is found in the attached NCKRI Context Map. Based on the core ideology discussion and the context trends, a proposed vision for the Institute emerged.

Proposed Vision: The National Cave and Karst Research Institute will become the world's most respected leader in promoting science-based understanding and sustainable stewardship of caves and karst lands.

In order to support the mission and achieve the vision, broad goal areas were identified and discussed in a carousel rotation process that allowed participants to work in small groups and yet have input into all goal areas. The identified goal areas were: Research, Resource Management, Education, and Data and Information Management. Notes from the discussions are found in the attached Workshop Notes. A graphic model is attached as NCKRI Bold Steps. Outreach and Marketing were two additional goal areas that were identified, but not discussed.

Goal Area Summaries:

- **Research**

- Avoid competition for research dollars
- Do BIG science with a large consortium (interdisciplinary, regional, national, cutting edge)
- Serve as a clearinghouse for basic research
- Focus research on applied research, problem-solving
- Provide grant programs and/or access to grants
- Publish an Annual Report of Institute activities
- Publish a National Report on Status and Trends of Caves and Karst
- Publish a National Research Catalog (priority problems in need of researchers)

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- **Resource Management**

- Develop *Best Management Practices* for cave and karst management
- Develop a digest of current studies and publications on resource management
- Take a systems view of management
- Set and communicate priorities for resource management
- Provide training, education and information sharing venues for cave and karst management
- Serve as liaison between Federal agencies, NGOs, academia, and private owners
- Be a recognized resource for policy developers and decision-makers

- **Education**

- Serve as clearinghouse for existing materials, best practices, lessons learned
- Support and partner with other education programs
- Provide National curriculum templates for K-12 and college
- Investigate and provide access to alternative delivery models (computer, PBS, on-line learning, distance learning)
- Provide educational and research opportunities for undergraduates, graduate students and post docs
- Develop interpretive materials and provide training venues for interpreters
- Provide grants for curriculum development and lesson plan development using best teaching practices
- Serve as a focal point for state level testing advocacy efforts

- **Data and Information Management**

- Provide both a physical and virtual library
- Serve as a clearinghouse (web portal) for distributed databases

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- Provide support for standards as well as the standards for collections
- Develop and communicate standards (QAQC) for web, digital, and other publishing
- Develop a referral directory of experts in cave and karst from multiple organizations
- Develop a source list/directory of taxonomist specialists
- Be a centralized location for data on projects in progress
- Provide access to and translation of international data and information

Day 2, October 6, 2003

On the second day of the workshop, participants examined a variety of potential organizational models. Discussion included the best features of each model as well as concerns with each model. Details on the discussion are included in the Workshop Notes and the Pros and Cons Matrix. After discussing all of the models, participants realized no one model adequately or precisely fits the needs of the Institute and meets the Congressional mandate. The mandate calls for joint administration with indirect control and ultimate responsibility for National Park Service and program administration by the academic partner(s). A set of criteria was developed for designing a new model that incorporates strengths of several models. The group felt strategic direction of the Institute should come from a Board of Directors whose membership should include Federal, non-Federal and NGO representation and should avoid the constraints of FACA.

Stakeholders, including volunteers, should have fair opportunities to provide input. Day-to-day operations would include fiscal administration, scheduling, and carrying out the direction given by the Board of Directors.

Organizational Model Criteria

- Federal agencies will work well together
- Federal agencies, academia, state and local government, nonprofits share in having a role, work together, and feel comfortable

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- Minimize bureaucracy and streamline decision-making
- Accommodate the ability to raise funds and leverage resources
- Encourage volunteerism
- Create a win-win scenario
- Build in accountability and assessment/evaluation

Following the discussion of models for organizational structure, the group discussed Institute funding. The current status is that money from the state of New Mexico is secure. Questions were raised about when matching money is needed in the budget cycle in order to guarantee Federal funds and whether matching credit can be carried over fiscal years. State money through state agencies (e.g., state geologists, state parks) was discussed as one source of funding. Grants and fees for courses, products and/or services were additional potential sources of revenue. The participants recommended leveraging opportunities within the private sector, which would mean obtaining a mechanism to accept donations (e.g., 501/C3 or C6).

The point was made that Congress and state legislatures are key, critical customers. The Institute needs to develop a coherent strategy with accompanying communication pieces for approaching state legislatures as well as Congress. Participants recommended building a coalition of legislators at both levels. In addition, participants recommended building an alliance among the non-Federal customers as advocates for the Institute. A list of potential advocates and audiences for communication pieces is included in the attached Workshop Notes.

The final workshop topic focused on building-design implications based on all of the previous discussions. The building site has been selected. A 20,000 square foot, two-story building is under consideration. It was noted that the site is a flood plain, so the insurance policy must reflect that fact. A laboratory with storage, observation and interaction areas, preparation areas, a loading dock, and an appropriate place for handling hazardous materials will be needed. Offices, a reception/administration area and a main

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receiving room will be needed. Classrooms and/or meeting rooms of varying or flexible sizes, will be needed as well as a facility to accommodate distance learning. A library (3,000-5,000 square feet) and space for science/study collections will be needed as well as a computer lab. Storage, kitchen, shower facility, and restrooms will be part of the design. A Visitor Center/Museum is in the design as well. A gift shop could be a source of revenue if space permits.

The workshop concluded with general enthusiasm and support for the Institute. The previous work of the Federal Working Group appears to have been reinforced and many new ideas were added. Participants seemed to be pleased to have had the opportunity to provide input, to give feedback, and to network with one another.

Recommendations of the Facilitator:

Goal Areas

Re-state the goal areas as SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timebound) with '04 and '05 critical success measures identified and quantified. This will provide the basis for an actionable business plan and the framework for the necessary accountability to guarantee continued funding.

Outreach and Marketing need to be developed as goal areas. There is some information in other places in the workshop documentation that will begin to fill in these goal areas.

Next Steps

Workshop participants, invitees, and critical stakeholders should receive a report of workshop findings and some information about what will happen in the next few months as a result of the workshop. They should be alerted if they might be involved in any action planning or review of decisions made regarding the direction of the Institute. For example, if an organizational model is being developed or additional MOUs are being written based on discussions at the workshop, will any of them be asked/invited to review and provide feedback?

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Communication Strategy

Develop a complete communication strategy for the audiences most critical to the success of the Institute. The strategy should be focused to address what those audiences need/want to know, what the institute needs/wants the critical audiences to know, what the messages need to say, how (venues) and when communication should take place. The Communication Strategy will complement the marketing and outreach goal areas.

Building on a Flood Plain

As you are probably aware, the NPS brand new visitor center at Jamestown was built on low land along the James River in Virginia and received five feet of water in the lower level during hurricane Isabel. Artifacts and historic archaeological documents have been badly damaged. A massive, very costly restoration effort is now underway. There is a great deal of concern and outspoken outrage in the region, some reflecting dissatisfaction with the NPS decision to build on the site. It might be wise to talk with folks there to learn from them the site, design, and planning questions you need to consider.

Testing Assumptions

There appeared to be general consensus with little opposition and just a few dissenting opinions expressed. It would be wise to offer participants an opportunity to share any thoughts they did not express during the workshop prior to going more public with the meeting summary. Dissenting or alternative opinions/perspectives could then be noted in the summary.

Funding Questions

Questions about matching fund commitments and carry over in the Federal budget process should be answered and included.